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Social Media Marketing Content Quality and Tourism Service Purchase Intention: Mediating Roles of Utilitarian and Hedonic Value

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Abstract

This study examines how social media marketing content quality relates to consumers' intention to purchase tourism services in Vietnam through two perceived-value mechanisms and an economic boundary condition. Guided by the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework, social media marketing content quality (SMCQ) represents the stimulus, utilitarian perceived value (UPV) and hedonic perceived value (HPV) are modeled as parallel organism states, and tourism service purchase intention (TSPI) represents the response. The study analyzes 170 valid survey observations from consumers who had used social media to search for tourism information. Scale reliability was satisfactory (Cronbach's α = 0.843–0.874). Standardized regression models with HC3 heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors and 5,000 bootstrap resamples were used to assess direct, indirect, and moderating associations. SMCQ positively predicts UPV (β = 0.518, p $<$ 0.001) and HPV (β = 0.439, p $<$ 0.001). Both UPV (β = 0.470, p $<$ 0.001) and HPV (β = 0.301, p $<$ 0.001) positively predict TSPI. Both estimated indirect effects are statistically significant, whereas the residual direct association between SMCQ and TSPI is non-significant after accounting for the mediators (β = 0.120, p = 0.081), a pattern consistent with indirect-only mediation. By contrast, current monthly income, used as an economic proxy for socioeconomic status, does not significantly moderate either perceived-value–intention relationship. The findings extend S-O-R explanations of digital tourism marketing by indicating that content quality is associated with purchase intention predominantly through perceived-value pathways, with utilitarian value emerging as the stronger pathway in this sample.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing Content Quality; Utilitarian Perceived Value; Hedonic Perceived Value; Purchase Intention; Income; Tourism; S-O-R Framework

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has become a central environment for information search, evaluation, and persuasion throughout the tourism customer journey. Travelers use social platforms to discover destinations, compare alternative services, evaluate experiential cues, consult user-generated content, and develop purchase intentions before consuming a tourism product. Earlier tourism research documented the growing role of social media in online travel information searches and in the planning stage of travelers' decisions [1, 2]. This role is particularly important because tourism services are intangible, experiential, and difficult to evaluate before purchase, making electronic word of mouth and other credible information valuable sources of decision support [3]. Under these conditions, high-quality digital content may reduce uncertainty, improve the diagnostic value of available information, and help prospective consumers anticipate the value of a future trip or service experience [4–6].

Although previous research reports positive relationships between social media marketing and travel-related behavioral intentions, an emphasis on direct associations alone does not fully explain the psychological processes involved [7, 8]. The important question is therefore not merely whether exposure to marketing content is related to purchase intention, but how consumers interpret digital information and transform it into evaluative states that make a potential purchase more or less attractive. The Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework provides a suitable theoretical perspective because it distinguishes external marketing stimuli from consumers' internal cognitive and affective evaluations and their subsequent behavioral responses [9].

Perceived value is particularly relevant to this process. Consumers may derive utilitarian value from useful, accurate, clear, and decision-supportive information, while also deriving hedonic value from enjoyment, emotional stimulation, vivid imagery, and the anticipation of an experience. This distinction is important in tourism, where purchasing typically involves both functional appraisal and imaginative engagement. Prior studies indicate that social media marketing can contribute to perceived value and that utilitarian and hedonic value are both positively associated with purchase intention [10, 11]. Related social-media research distinguishes the cognitive and affective dimensions of consumer engagement, adding theoretical support for analyzing multiple evaluative responses rather than one undifferentiated reaction [12]. Nevertheless, treating perceived value as a single aggregate construct may conceal whether cognitive-functional and affective-experiential pathways operate simultaneously and with different strengths.

A further issue concerns consumer economic conditions. Socioeconomic status (SES) is inherently multidimensional and can include income, education, occupation, wealth, and subjective social position [13]. Because the present survey records current monthly income but does not provide the other dimensions of SES, this study treats income as a limited economic proxy rather than as a complete measure of socioeconomic position. This distinction is important because economic resources may condition whether perceived value is translated into purchase intention, but the strength and direction of such moderation are context dependent. Recent tourism research, for example, identifies childhood SES as a moderator of travel-influencer message effectiveness [14], while other work recommends examining income-based heterogeneity in social media responses [10].

This study therefore makes three focused contributions. First, it operationalizes the stimulus specifically as social media marketing content quality, rather than treating social media marketing as a broad and undifferentiated construct. Second, it separates the organism stage into parallel utilitarian and hedonic perceived-value pathways and tests their indirect associations with tourism service purchase intention. Third, it evaluates current income as a possible boundary condition, while explicitly restricting interpretation to the economic dimension of socioeconomic status. Empirically, the study provides evidence from the Vietnamese tourism-services context and adds to research on how information quality, value formation, and consumer decisions are connected in digital travel environments.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

The S-O-R framework proposes that environmental stimuli influence internal cognitive and affective states, which subsequently shape behavioral responses [9]. In digital tourism marketing, the external stimulus is not social media in the abstract but the content that consumers actually encounter. High-quality content is more likely to be informative, coherent, relevant, credible, and useful for decision making. Evidence from tourism information-quality research, electronic word-of-mouth studies, and video-based marketing further underlines the importance of relevant, credible, and useful content for travel-related intentions and other behavioral outcomes [5–8].

Accordingly, this study models SMCQ as the stimulus, UPV and HPV as parallel organism states, and TSPI as the behavioral response. This specification retains a parsimonious theoretical structure: content quality is expected to be associated with intention partly because it changes consumers' assessments of what a service can provide and their anticipation of how the experience may feel. By distinguishing the two perceived-value pathways, the model can test their respective associations while retaining a residual direct relationship between content quality and intention.

Perceived value refers to a consumer's overall assessment of benefits received relative to the sacrifices required to

obtain them [15]. Subsequent research established that value is multidimensional rather than unitary [16, 17]. Utilitarian value captures instrumental benefits such as usefulness, efficiency, problem solving, and decision support, whereas hedonic value captures enjoyment, pleasure, emotional stimulation, and experiential appeal.

The distinction is particularly salient for tourism. A prospective traveler may simultaneously ask whether a service is practical, reliable, and worth the expenditure and whether the anticipated experience is enjoyable, exciting, or emotionally meaningful. Evidence from social-media purchasing research indicates that utilitarian and hedonic evaluations can each contribute to purchase intention, while evidence from airline marketing suggests that perceived value may help account for relationships between social media marketing and intended purchases [10, 11]. Tourism information-quality research has also identified intervening evaluative processes such as trust and self-congruity, reinforcing the importance of examining mechanisms rather than relying solely on direct relationships [7].

High-quality social media content may lower information-search costs, make service attributes easier to compare, and increase consumers' confidence in the information used to evaluate a tourism purchase. Research on information adoption identifies information quality, credibility, and usefulness as important factors in online purchase decisions [8]. These benefits can increase the practical utility of both the content itself and the tourism service it describes, providing a clear theoretical basis for the anticipated relationship between SMCQ and utilitarian value.

H1: Social media marketing content quality positively affects utilitarian perceived value.

At the same time, visually rich, vivid, and emotionally engaging tourism content can stimulate enjoyment, curiosity, anticipation, and the mental simulation of a travel experience. Experiential consumption research emphasizes fantasies, feelings, and fun as elements of consumer response [18]. Related research on social-media engagement further identifies affective involvement alongside cognitive processing, providing additional support for examining hedonic value as a distinct psychological pathway [12].

H2: Social media marketing content quality positively affects hedonic perceived value.

Utilitarian value should be positively related to purchase intention when consumers regard a tourism service as useful, worthwhile, convenient, and capable of satisfying practical travel goals. Hedonic value, by contrast, should be associated with greater purchase intention through anticipated pleasure, enjoyment, and the emotional attractiveness of the experience. The multidimensional value literature suggests that these evaluations are distinguishable rather than interchangeable [16, 17]. Both pathways are therefore expected to contribute separately to reported behavioral intention, even when their effects are estimated within the same model.

H3: Utilitarian perceived value positively affects purchase intention for tourism services.

H4: Hedonic perceived value positively affects purchase intention for tourism services.

Prior research documents positive relationships between social media marketing, consumer evaluations, and purchase intention in tourism-related and other consumer contexts [4, 8, 19]. A residual direct path is therefore retained in the model to determine whether content quality influences purchase intention beyond the two value mechanisms.

H5: Social media marketing content quality has a positive direct effect on purchase intention for tourism services.

The central S-O-R proposition is that relationships between external stimuli and responses can be explained, at least in part, through internal organism states. In the present model, content quality is expected to relate to both functional and experiential evaluations, which are in turn expected to relate to purchase intention. Parallel mediation analysis allows each perceived-value pathway to be evaluated while accounting for the other pathway and the remaining direct association. The empirical analysis tests statistical indirect effects rather than assuming that their direction establishes causation.

H6: Utilitarian perceived value mediates the relationship between social media marketing content quality and purchase intention for tourism services.

H7: Hedonic perceived value mediates the relationship between social media marketing content quality and purchase intention for tourism services.

Economic resources may affect the extent to which a favorable value evaluation can be converted into purchase intention. A consumer can recognize high value yet remain constrained by affordability, while a consumer with greater resources may face fewer budget restrictions. However, prior evidence does not imply a universal direction of moderation, and SES-related effects may depend on the indicator, product, message, and travel context [14]. Because only income is available as an economic indicator, the moderation hypotheses deliberately concern differences in the strength of the value–intention relationships rather than assuming that higher income must systematically strengthen or weaken either association.

H8: Income-based socioeconomic status moderates the relationship between utilitarian perceived value and purchase intention for tourism services.

H9: Income-based socioeconomic status moderates the relationship between hedonic perceived value and purchase intention for tourism services.

Figure 1 summarizes the proposed relationships among social media marketing content quality, utilitarian and hedonic perceived value, tourism service purchase intention, and the income-based moderator. The illustration distinguishes the parallel mediating pathways from the two interaction hypotheses.

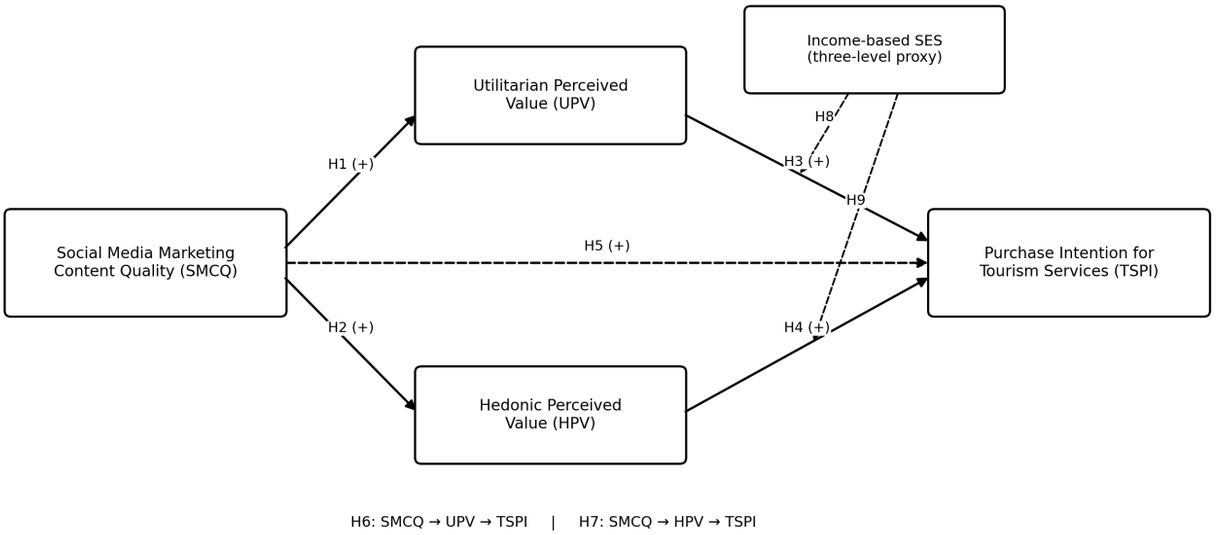


Figure 1. *Proposed Research Model*

Note. Income is used as an economic proxy for socioeconomic status and does not represent the full multidimensional SES construct.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

The study analyzes 170 valid survey observations collected from consumers who had used social media to search for tourism information and who were involved in a tourism-service purchase decision or intended to purchase tourism services. The design is cross-sectional and observational; consequently, the estimated relationships are interpreted as associations rather than as experimentally established causal effects. All focal constructs were measured with seven-point Likert response scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The analysis is based on respondents' reported perceptions and intentions rather than verified transactions or subsequently observed purchase behavior.

The sample comprised 48.2% male respondents, 47.6% female respondents, and 4.1% who preferred not to disclose their gender (percentages differ slightly from 100% because of rounding). Respondents aged 18–25 accounted for 35.9% of the sample, those aged 26–35 for 37.6%, those aged 36–45 for 16.5%, and the remainder were aged 46 or older. In terms of current monthly income, 31.8% reported less than VND 10 million, 52.4% reported VND 10–20 million, and 15.9% reported more than VND 20 million.

SMCQ was measured with four observed items, whereas UPV, HPV, and TSPI were each measured with three items. Composite scores were calculated by averaging the item responses within each construct. Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from 0.843 to 0.874, exceeding the commonly used threshold of 0.70 and indicating satisfactory internal consistency for the composite-score analysis. The means, standard deviations, item counts, and reliability estimates are reported in Table 1. Current monthly income was coded into three ordered categories: below VND 10 million, VND 10–20 million, and above VND 20 million. The income measure therefore captures a limited aspect of economic resources and should not be interpreted as a complete measure of socioeconomic status.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics and Scale Reliability*

Construct	Code	Items	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α
Social media marketing content quality	SMCQ	4	4.954	1.002	0.843
Utilitarian perceived value	UPV	3	4.992	1.127	0.860
Hedonic perceived value	HPV	3	4.896	1.086	0.858
Tourism service purchase intention	TSPI	3	4.957	1.154	0.874

The analysis follows a conditional-process regression logic. First, standardized regression models estimate the effects of SMCQ on UPV and HPV. Second, TSPI is regressed simultaneously on SMCQ, UPV, and HPV to estimate their unique effects and the residual direct effect of SMCQ. Third, the two indirect effects are evaluated using 5,000 bootstrap resamples and percentile-based 95% confidence intervals. An indirect effect is regarded as statistically supported when its bootstrap confidence interval excludes zero [20, 21]. This approach allows the two indirect pathways to be examined separately and

jointly while avoiding reliance on a significant residual direct effect as a prerequisite for mediation.

Fourth, moderation is tested by adding the income proxy and the interaction terms UPV × income and HPV × income to the TSPI model. The continuous focal predictors were standardized before product terms were created; the three-category income indicator was treated as an ordered economic-resource proxy and standardized for the interaction analysis. HC3 heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors were used for the regression tests to support more reliable inference when error variance is not constant; their use is particularly appropriate for regression analyses with samples of the present size [22, 23]. Variance inflation factors ranged from 1.24 to 1.62 in the main model and remained below 1.65 in the moderation model, suggesting that multicollinearity was not a material concern.

4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

As shown in Table 2, Pearson correlation coefficients indicate positive associations among all four focal constructs. SMCQ is positively correlated with UPV (r = 0.518), HPV (r = 0.439), and TSPI (r = 0.496). UPV shows the strongest bivariate relationship with TSPI (r = 0.594), while HPV is moderately correlated with TSPI (r = 0.450). The relatively modest correlation between UPV and HPV (r = 0.205) supports the conceptual distinction between the functional and experiential value dimensions.

Table 2. *Correlation Matrix of the Constructs*

Variable	SMCQ	UPV	HPV	TSPI
SMCQ	1.000			
UPV	0.518	1.000		
HPV	0.439	0.205	1.000	
TSPI	0.496	0.594	0.450	1.000

As summarized in Table 3, SMCQ has a positive and statistically significant association with UPV (β = 0.518, p $<$ 0.001; R^2 = 0.268) and HPV (β = 0.439, p $<$ 0.001; R^2 = 0.193), supporting H1 and H2. In the model explaining TSPI, UPV has the largest standardized coefficient (β = 0.470, p $<$ 0.001), followed by HPV (β = 0.301, p $<$ 0.001), supporting H3 and H4. After both value dimensions are entered simultaneously, the direct SMCQ → TSPI coefficient declines to β = 0.120 and is not statistically significant at the 5% level (p = 0.081); consequently, H5 is not supported in the mediation model. Together, SMCQ, UPV, and HPV explain 47.4% of the variance in TSPI.

Table 3. *Direct-Effect Hypothesis Tests*

Hypothesis	Path	β	HC3 SE	t	p	Decision
H1	SMCQ → UPV	0.518	0.062	8.375	<0.001	Supported
H2	SMCQ → HPV	0.439	0.066	6.686	<0.001	Supported
H3	UPV → TSPI	0.470	0.065	7.215	<0.001	Supported
H4	HPV → TSPI	0.301	0.058	5.209	<0.001	Supported
H5	SMCQ → TSPI	0.120	0.069	1.748	0.081	Not supported

As reported in Table 4, bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples indicates that both specific indirect effects are statistically supported because their 95% confidence intervals exclude zero. The indirect effect through UPV is 0.241 (95% CI [0.166, 0.331]), whereas the indirect effect through HPV is 0.130 (95% CI [0.077, 0.196]). The total indirect effect is 0.372 (95% CI [0.280, 0.475]). H6 and H7 are therefore supported.

The total effect of SMCQ on TSPI before the mediators are included is β = 0.496 (p $<$ 0.001), whereas the residual direct effect after controlling for both mediators falls to β = 0.120 (p = 0.081). Under the typology proposed by Zhao *et al.* [21], this empirical pattern is consistent with indirect-only mediation: the association between content quality and purchase intention is carried primarily through the two perceived-value pathways rather than through a statistically detectable residual direct path.

Table 4. *Bootstrap Results for Indirect Effects*

Hypothesis	Indirect path	Effect	2.5% CI	97.5% CI
H6	SMCQ → UPV → TSPI	0.241	0.166	0.331
H7	SMCQ → HPV → TSPI	0.130	0.077	0.196
—	Total indirect effect	0.372	0.280	0.475

When the income proxy and the two interaction terms are included, the UPV → TSPI relationship remains positive and significant (β = 0.470, p $<$ 0.001), and the HPV → TSPI relationship also remains significant (β = 0.297, p $<$ 0.001). However, the UPV × income interaction is not significant (β = -0.061, p = 0.219), and the HPV × income interaction is also nonsignificant (β = 0.029, p = 0.621). H8 and H9 are therefore not supported. Table 5 reports the nonsignificant

interaction coefficients. The moderation model explains 48.0% of the variance in TSPI, an increase of only 0.6 percentage points relative to the model without the interaction terms.

The income-group pattern is directionally consistent with the main model: the UPV → TSPI coefficient remains positive across the three groups, and the HPV → TSPI relationship also retains a positive direction, although statistical significance varies with subgroup size. Given the modest sample and the comparatively small high-income subgroup, the results should be interpreted as an absence of detectable moderation in this sample rather than as evidence that economic resources are universally irrelevant.

Table 5. *Moderation Tests*

Hypothesis	Interaction	β	HC3 SE	t	p	Decision
H8	UPV × income → TSPI	-0.061	0.050	-1.229	0.219	Not supported
H9	HPV × income → TSPI	0.029	0.059	0.495	0.621	Not supported

5. DISCUSSION

The findings clarify the perceived-value pathways through which social media marketing content quality is associated with tourism service purchase intention. The first key result is that SMCQ is positively associated with both utilitarian and hedonic perceived value. The effect on UPV is stronger than the effect on HPV, suggesting that consumers in this sample respond particularly strongly to content that supports information processing and decision making. This interpretation is consistent with research linking the quality of online content to viewers' responses and with studies showing that useful travel information and social-media marketing are related to perceived value and behavioral intention [5, 7, 10]. Earlier findings on information credibility and usefulness in electronic word of mouth likewise provide support for the importance of content that assists consumers in evaluating unfamiliar services [8].

Second, both value dimensions independently contribute to purchase intention, but the effect of UPV is larger than that of HPV. This does not imply that emotional appeal is unimportant. Rather, it suggests that tourism content is more likely to support purchase formation when experiential attractiveness is accompanied by information that helps consumers evaluate fit, usefulness, and the reasonableness of the choice. The result is also consistent with evidence that utilitarian and hedonic value may coexist as distinct correlates of purchase intention in social-media environments [11], as well as with established multidimensional accounts of perceived value [16, 17].

Third, the direct SMCQ → TSPI relationship becomes nonsignificant after the two value dimensions are included. This pattern supports a theoretical interpretation in which the association between content quality and intention is not limited to a simple stimulus–response relationship. Instead, the estimated indirect associations operate through the functional and experiential evaluations that respondents report deriving from digital content. Because the design is cross-sectional, these statistical mediation results cannot, by themselves, establish the causal ordering of the constructs. In practical terms, high-quality content matters because it helps users understand the service and anticipate a desirable experience, not merely because it is present on social media.

Fourth, the study does not detect significant moderation by current monthly income. This result should be interpreted narrowly. SES is multidimensional, and income represents only one economic component [13]. Moreover, previous travel-influencer research identifies a moderating role for childhood SES in a different mechanism involving message sidedness, perceived realness, and trust [14]. The present nonsignificant interactions therefore delimit the observed model rather than negate the broader relevance of socioeconomic conditions. Within this sample, the value-creation mechanism appears comparatively stable across the three income categories.

6. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

This study offers three theoretical contributions. First, it refines the operationalization of the stimulus component of the S-O-R model by focusing on social media marketing content quality, instead of treating social media marketing as an overly broad and undifferentiated construct. This improves construct–measure alignment and makes the empirical interpretation more precise.

Second, it separates the organism stage into parallel utilitarian and hedonic perceived-value mechanisms. The statistically significant indirect effects are consistent with both cognitive-functional and affective-experiential evaluations linking content quality to purchase intention, but with different estimated magnitudes. This provides a more differentiated explanation than a single perceived-value mediator and reinforces the multidimensional view of consumer value advanced by Babin *et al.* [16] and Sweeney and Soutar [17].

Third, the study examines a possible boundary condition by treating current income as an economic proxy for SES. The absence of statistically significant interaction effects is informative within the limits of the observed sample, because the estimated value–intention associations do not exhibit detectable differences attributable to the income indicator used

here. At the same time, the explicit distinction between income and the full SES construct prevents overgeneralization and provides a clearer agenda for future research.

For tourism firms, the findings imply that social media content should be designed to create both decision utility and experiential desire. The utilitarian layer should provide concrete, decision-relevant information such as itinerary details, inclusions and exclusions, prices, booking conditions, locations, accessibility, service evidence, and credible customer feedback. These elements can reduce uncertainty, support comparisons across service alternatives, and help prospective travelers assess whether a specific offer meets their needs and practical constraints, an approach consistent with tourism information-search research [1, 2].

The hedonic layer should make the experience vivid and emotionally attractive through visual storytelling, atmosphere, sound, narrative sequencing, and moments that allow consumers to imagine themselves in the experience. However, because UPV shows the stronger relationship with purchase intention, firms should avoid optimizing content for attention or entertainment alone. High reach and view counts do not necessarily correspond to stronger purchase intention when the content fails to answer consumers' practical questions or to supply credible information, as suggested by work on content quality and information adoption [5, 8].

The nonsignificant income interactions further suggest that firms may not need fundamentally different value-creation logic for each income category. Income remains relevant for pricing, package structure, promotional offers, and affordability, but the core architecture of effective content—clarity, usefulness, credibility, and experiential appeal—can remain broadly consistent. More refined segmentation may be achieved by combining income with trip purpose, travel frequency, digital behavior, engagement level, and service category.

7. LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Several limitations should guide interpretation. First, the moderator captures current monthly income only. Because SES also encompasses education, occupation, wealth, and subjective social position, the present analysis should not be interpreted as a comprehensive test of socioeconomic status. Future studies should employ multidimensional SES measures and may separately examine current and childhood socioeconomic conditions.

Second, the sample contains 170 observations, including only 27 respondents in the highest-income category. This limits statistical power for detecting small interaction effects and reduces the stability of subgroup comparisons. Replication with a larger and more balanced sample is therefore important, particularly if future work aims to compare several economic or demographic segments.

Third, the study is cross-sectional and relies on self-reported purchase intention. The estimated relationships therefore support association-based and mechanism-consistent interpretations but do not establish causal effects. Experimental designs, longitudinal data, field interventions, or transaction-based outcomes would provide stronger causal evidence.

Fourth, the analysis uses composite scores and regression-based conditional-process models. Future research could employ a full latent-variable approach to examine convergent validity, discriminant validity, measurement error, and structural relationships simultaneously. This would be especially valuable when extending SMCQ into a multidimensional social media marketing construct.

Finally, social media marketing is operationalized here primarily through content quality, leaving other potentially relevant dimensions outside the present model. Future models could incorporate interactivity, entertainment, source credibility, personalization, electronic word of mouth, social influence, or cultural congruence and test whether different stimuli are related to utilitarian and hedonic value through distinct pathways. Research on consumer engagement and tourism information search provides useful starting points for specifying and testing such extensions [2, 3, 12].

8. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the relationship between social media marketing content quality and tourism service purchase intention is best understood as a value-creation process. High-quality content is associated with stronger utilitarian and hedonic perceived value, and both value dimensions are positively related to purchase intention. The utilitarian pathway is stronger in the present sample, while the residual direct association between content quality and purchase intention becomes nonsignificant after both mediators are included in the same regression model.

Current monthly income does not significantly moderate either value–intention relationship in this sample, suggesting that the two estimated associations are comparatively similar across the observed income categories, although small interaction effects cannot be excluded. Taken together, the findings support a focused S-O-R explanation in which effective tourism content works primarily by helping consumers perceive the service as useful and worthwhile while also making the anticipated experience emotionally attractive.

Author Contributions

Both authors contributed equally to the study and manuscript preparation, reviewed and approved the final version, and accept responsibility for the work.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no competing interests.

Data Availability

The data are available from the corresponding author upon request.

Use of Generative AI

Generative AI assisted with language and formatting edits. The authors retain responsibility for the study, analyses, references, and conclusions.

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